

# Integrating SFT with ACT to Motivate Clients to Engage in Meaningful Change

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Clients want  
meaningful  
change!







# Let's talk integration

SFT holds a strength-based lens

ACT provides the process

Deeper understanding of self

Creates more capacity

Clarity of other's context, strengths & values

Collaboratively make meaningful change in relationship



The background of the slide features a collage of lightbulb icons. Most are white line-art drawings on light blue sticky notes, arranged in a circular pattern. One sticky note in the center is a vibrant pink color and features a glowing lightbulb icon with yellow rays emanating from it, signifying an idea or insight.

# Context Matters!

Shared therapeutic assumption of Solution Focused Therapy (SFT) & Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT): Individual's behaviors are shaped by its context (Corcoran, 2000; Henrikson, 2019)

- Allows for each unique individual to shine
- Recognizes our individual differences



## Therapist Stance

- NOT an Expert
- Curious Collaborator with a Different Perspective



# Keys to Integration of SFT & ACT

Strength = Hope  
Values = Purpose



# Meet Mary & Derrick

- Married for about 12 years
- Interracial & interfaith couple
  - Mary identifies as Black and reports a strong Christian faith
  - Derrick identifies as White and reports Buddhist beliefs
- 2 children ages 5 & 9
- Reach out for therapy services because they are having challenges communicating and having more arguments around parenting.

**Think about Mary & Derrick as we move through today's presentation**





## What's the context with Mary & Derrick?

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Separate spiritual belief systems

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Different racial/ethnic backgrounds

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Shared hope to instill values to children

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Old relationship dynamics are no longer working for their relationship

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Values might have evolved, especially with Derrick's recent spiritual change

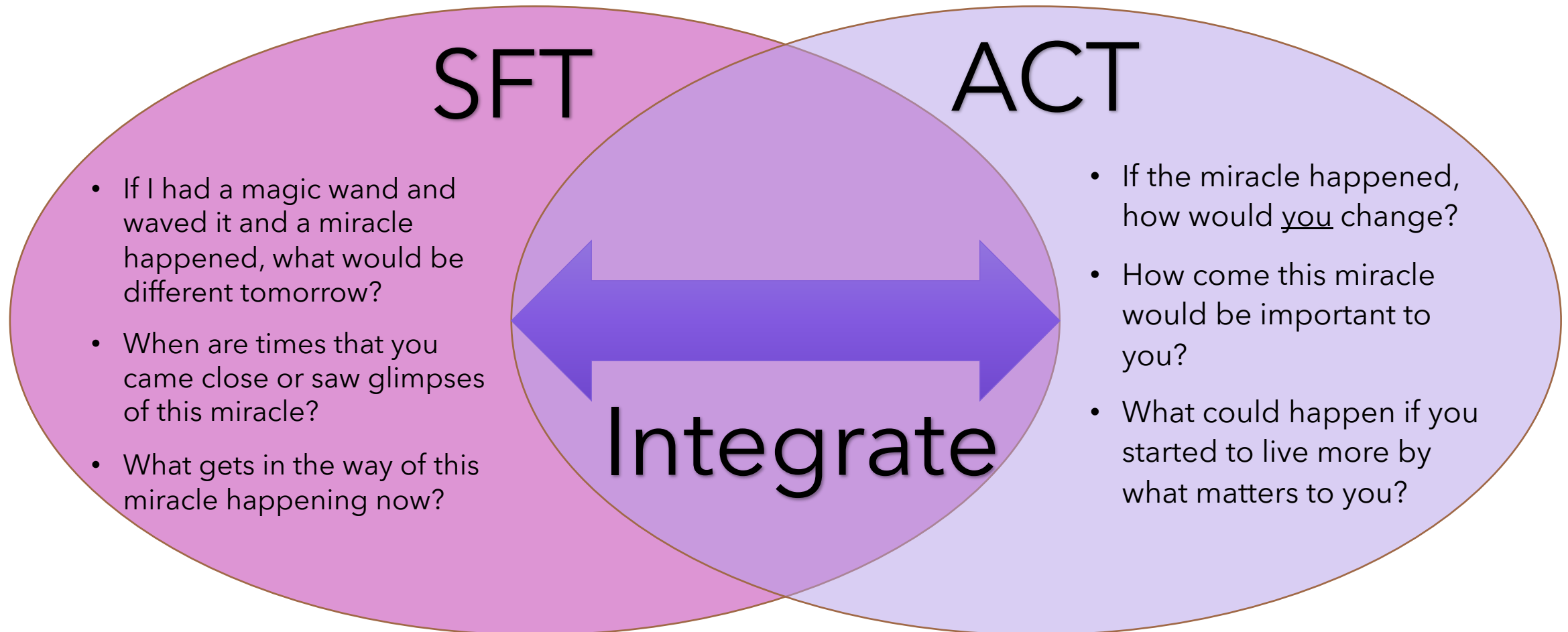




## Goal of SFT & ACT

- **ACT:** Be psychologically present, acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, & take values based effective action
- **SFT:** Shift the focus to the future rather than the past, strengths rather than weaknesses, and on skills and strategies that would help reaching the goals

# Clarify Goal: Values-Based Miracle Question



# SFT Therapist



Highlight Strengths Reported During Miracle Question



Share Strengths I Heard



Might miss out on some valuable context by not spending much time on the past



# How Does ACT Build on SFT?

Be Present & Do  
What Matters

Love is an  
Action

Noticing the  
Power of the  
Present Moment

Respect &  
Honor the Past

# Noticing Present Moment Exercise





Focus on Present/Future but Honor the Past

Learn more about the history of their relationship patterns & take perspective.





# Dispel the Myths of Relationships

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**What myths have you heard?**



# **Myth – Perfect Partner** (Does not exist!)

Becoming stuck by your partner's "should" behavior

A row of wooden Scrabble tiles spelling out the word "INCOMPLETE" diagonally across the upper half of the image. The tiles are light brown with black letters and numbers. The letters are: I (1), N (1), C (3), O (1), M (3), P (3), L (1), E (1), T (1).

# Myth - You Complete Me

(You are already complete!)

Relying on each other to be "complete" creates challenges



The background is a dark, slightly blurred photograph of a wooden desk. On the desk, there are several calligraphy-related items: a white sign with the words 'COME GO' written in a large, elegant, black cursive font; a watercolor palette with various shades of orange, red, and pink; a tube of white acrylic paint; and several calligraphy pens and brushes. The overall lighting is soft and focused on the central text.


# Myth – Love Should be Easy

(Could it really be that easy?)

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Living with someone with different thoughts, history, love languages, standards , etc. is a lot to navigate



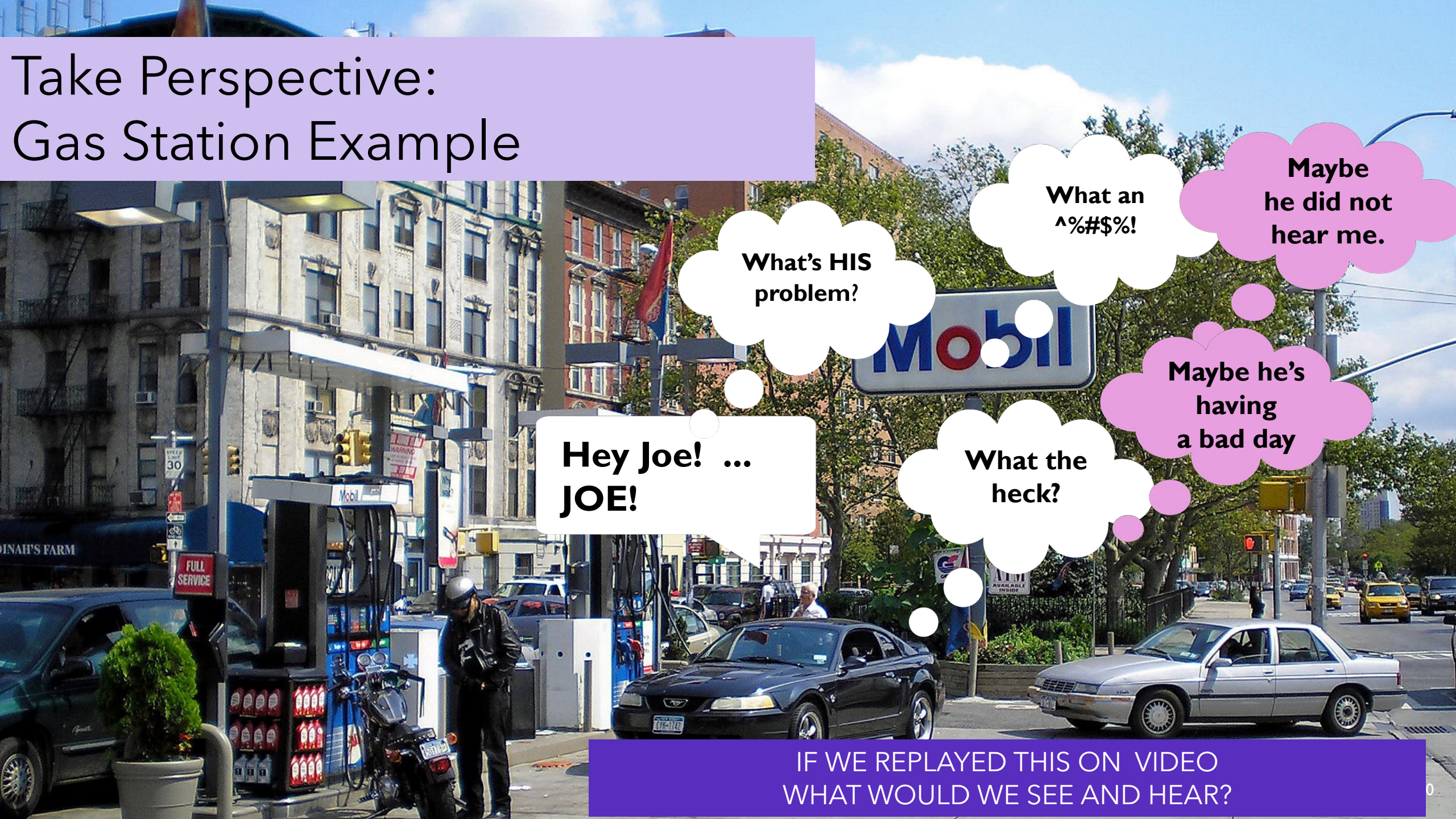


**Myth - Everlasting Love**  
(Thinking you can coast once  
we fall in love)

Running on auto pilot creates reactivity and avoidance.



# Take Perspective: Gas Station Example



What's HIS problem?

What an ^%#\$%!

Maybe he did not hear me.

Hey Joe! ...  
**JOE!**

What the heck?

Maybe he's having a bad day

IF WE REPLAYED THIS ON VIDEO  
WHAT WOULD WE SEE AND HEAR?



# Let's Find Our Clients Values

## Values-Driven Change is NOT:

- Resentful change
- Guilt-induced change
- Keeping partner 'happy' change
- 'Putting up with' change

## Values-Driven Change IS:

- Motivator to endure discomfort (which is inevitable w/ change)
- Long lasting because it feels purposeful



# Values Exercise

50-Year Anniversary

# Committed Action

Now we know the goals, the strengths, dispelled the myths, & learned about their values...How do we tie it all together for change?

**LOVE is ACTION!**





# LOVE is ACTION small steps

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- **What small steps can you take towards meaningful change in your relationship?**
- **How can we act with love in conversations?**





## Small Steps Exercise

- Step 1: Identify Your Guiding Values
- Step 2: Think of Strengths or Exceptions
- Step 2: Set a SMART goal
- Step 3: Identify Benefits
- Step 4: Identifying Obstacles
- Step 5: Make a Commitment

A close-up photograph of a man and a woman smiling warmly at each other. The woman is on the left, looking down and to the right, while the man is on the right, looking down and to the left. They appear to be in a living room with a white sofa and potted plants in the background. The lighting is soft and warm.

# Remember Mary & Derrick?

They break into a fight during session, what should we do?



A photograph of two bison in a grassy field. The bison in the foreground is facing left, and the one behind it is also facing left. The background is a blurred green field with some trees. The text "What to do when an argument starts in session?" is overlaid in white, centered horizontally, with a thin white line underneath it.

What to do when an argument starts in session?



# Notice Your Own Experience

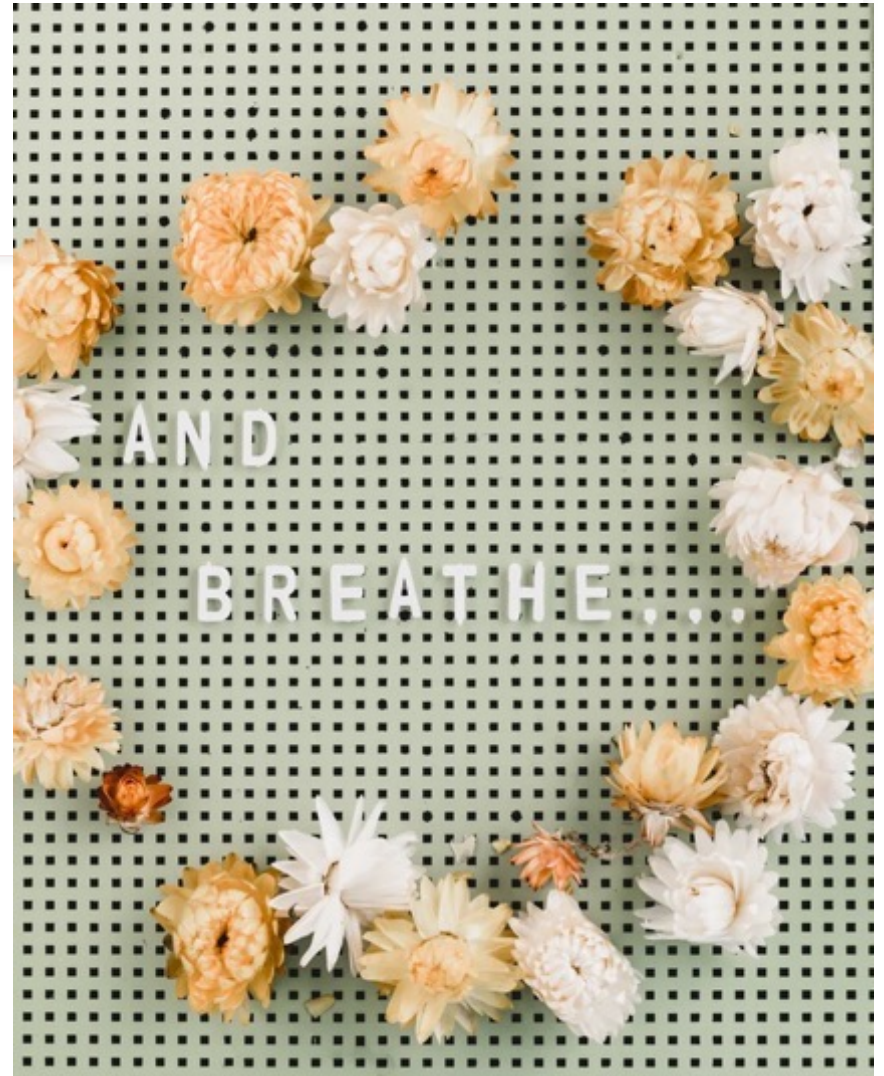
- Notice, your own present moment as a therapist
- Take a breath and diffuse your thoughts



# Model Mindfulness

Stop the argument & Do  
mindfulness right then and there

- Ask:
  - What is your body doing?  
Breathe into it.
  - What is your mind saying?  
Name it.







# Highlight Strengths

- Highlight the strengths you see or even any exceptions you noticed in this argument
- Ask couple to share if they noticed any positive changes

## Clarify Values

What type of partner do you want to be in this relationship?





## Scaling Questions

- On a scale from 0-10, how would they rate yourself as being that type of partner?
- Ask, what would be a small step to move them up one number towards a 10?



# Wrap Up

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- Context Matters
- Keys: Strength & Values
- Be Present & Do What Matters!
- Respect & Honor the Past
- Love is an Action
- Small Steps for Meaningful Change





Questions?



# Reference

- Harris, R. (2009). Mindfulness without meditation. *Healthcare counselling & psychotherapy journal*, 9(4), 21-24.
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- Henriksen, K. (2019). The values compass: helping athletes act in accordance with their values through functional analysis. *Journal of sport psychology in action*, 10(4), 199-207.
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